

What should you do when the law says you can't pray? A more penetrating question is what *would* you do? We have a vivid example of what we should do in Daniel 6. In the story of "Daniel in the Lion's Den," the obvious lesson is we should pray, no matter what.

At the outset, I want to tell you what's going to happen at the end of this message. We're going to pray. Not just a perfunctory prayer of habit to close the service. I am going to invite you to pray like Daniel prayed, to call out to God from the heart, and say, "O God, I need You, and I need Your help. I pledge allegiance to You."

I have to tell you that God did some surgery on my heart last week while attending the Moody Bible Institute's Pastors Conference. On Wednesday, Jim Cymbala, pastor of the inner city Brooklyn Tabernacle, challenged us as pastors to get back to the basics and lead our churches to be praying churches.

Twenty years ago, when he became pastor, the church numbered under 20 people. Today the church has four Sunday services. But the heartbeat of the church is its midweek prayer service, and in fact, Pastor Cymbala said there was standing room only last Tuesday evening as God's people came to pray at the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

Cymbala remarked, "I hear Christians upset because there's no prayer in the schools, and I say, 'What a joke! No prayer in schools? There's no prayer in the churches!'"

He's right. What we really need today is not legislation. We need as God's people to get on our faces before God. God hasn't changed. Throughout the Scriptures, His invitation is the same, "Call upon Me, and I will answer you. Call upon Me." But if we don't call, He won't answer.

So at the end of the service, I am going to give you an opportunity to pray. We're going to respond to the proclamation of God's truth with a time of singing and praying.

This morning we're going to consider a familiar story and a largely forgotten lesson. It's the familiar story of a man who prayed when it would have been safer not to pray. We've heard of Daniel in the lion's den from childhood, yet never grow too old to appreciate its powerful message, a message which says, "It's always right to do right."

Proposition: From Daniel 6:1-15, we're going to highlight Daniel's response to three situations.

- I. Situation #1: The Promotion (1-5)
 - A. Daniel rose to the top (1-3).
 - B. Daniel had fixed priorities (4-5).
 1. God is first.
 2. My other responsibilities come next.
- II. Situation #2: The Plot (6-9)
 - A. His peers framed him (6-8).
 1. They used flattery.
 2. They used deception.
 - B. The king forgot him (9).
- III. Situation #3: The Prayer (10-14)

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

- A. Daniel prayed like he always prayed (10-11).
 - 1. It was a bold prayer.
 - 2. It was a biblical prayer.
 - 3. It was a humble prayer.
 - 4. It was a disciplined prayer.
 - 5. It was a grateful prayer.
 - 6. It was a specific prayer.
- B. His peers pounced on him as planned (12-15).
- C. A pagan king prayed (16).

Lessons: What can we learn from Daniel?

- 1. We must take God seriously.
- 2. We must take prayer seriously.

I. Situation #1: The Promotion (1-5)

Allow me to set the stage. Daniel is now in his eighties. Nebuchadnezzar, the king who destroyed his homeland and deported him into captivity, is gone. Belshazzar is gone. In fact, the Babylonian empire is gone. Just as Daniel predicted in his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two, the kingdom of bronze had overthrown the Babylonians. The Medo-Persians were in control under a leader named Darius (5:31; 6:1; possibly another name for Cyrus).

Think about an obvious lesson. The wicked come and go, but the godly stand. Mighty Pharaoh is gone, but godly Moses still speaks to us. King Herod is no more, but you hold the testimony of John the Baptist in your hands. Nero is gone, but Paul's words live on. Pilate is no more, but Jesus is King forever. The wicked come and go, but the godly stand forever. So it was with Daniel.

A. Daniel rose to the top (1-3). Let's read verses 1-2, "It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, who should be over the whole kingdom. And over these, three presidents, of whom Daniel was first; that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage."

When Darius took over, he set up a new chain of command. He appointed 120 "princes" (NIV "satraps") who were accountable to 3 "presidents" (NIV "administrators") whose job it was to represent the will of king Darius.

Once again, Daniel rose to the top. V 3 states, "Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm."

Like cream, Daniel keeps rising to the top. Someone has observed that there are three types of people in the world: people who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who wonder what happened.

Daniel was a leader. As a teenager, he excelled in chapter one. In his mid-life years, he saved the day and was promoted in chapter two. Later, during Belshazzar's reign, he advanced to the third highest position in the land. And now, under Darius, he rises again.

Why did Daniel prosper? Was it because he knew how to lead people? Not really. What was his secret? It was this. He knew how to follow God. Leadership skills? Yes, he had them, but what set him apart from his peers was that God was real in his life.

B. Daniel had fixed priorities (4-5). We discover what his priorities were by listening to a discussion about Daniel held by his jealous fellow-leaders. Notice verses 4-5 (NIV), "At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so."

That's staggering! In our day, with our public leaders under the careful scrutiny of the media, it seems like eventually we discover a skeleton in the closet of every official. Not so with Daniel! How could that be?

V 4 continues, "They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent." There simply was no mud in Daniel's life. He was a man of integrity, not flashy but reliable over the long haul. He'd been in public service over 60 years, and his critics could not find one trace of corruption. Day in and day out, he did his job. He was not negligent, and indeed provides us with a good work-ethic model.

Titus 2:9-10 instructs, "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior, in all things."

Do you make God look good on your job? Daniel did. He was promoted because of it. That's what irritated his jealous peers.

Watch what they blurted out in frustration in v 5 (NIV), "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

I get a little disturbed by the gloom and doom people who say, "Our world is so corrupt that we just can't live a godly life." Listen, Daniel lived in the midst of corruption and lust, surrounded by government officials who were self-seeking and sinful, yet his integrity remained in tact. It is possible to remain pure in a pagan world.

But you have to have the right priorities, the fixed priorities that motivated Daniel. Here they are, and the order is critical.

1. *God is first.* I find it interesting that not only did Daniel know what his priorities were, but his critics knew them too. They knew Daniel's commitments. They knew there was only one potential area to get at Daniel, and that had to do with the law of his God. Why? Because they knew that in Daniel's priority structure, God is first.

2. *My other responsibilities come next.* Pretty basic, isn't it. God is first, everything else comes next. Here's how Daniel operated, and his critics knew it: God is first, the king is second. God is first, my job is second. God is more important than my family, my reputation, my country.

When I was in High School, I had a Cross Country coach who was committed to winning. I learned a lot from him about hard work, but there was one area that really challenged my convictions. Coach had practice on Sunday afternoons. It was "optional," and it was supposed to be relaxing (I never figured out how a 5 mile run was relaxing!), but the unspoken assumption was, "If you want to be a winner, you need to come to this workout." I tensed up every time he asked if I was coming to the Sunday practice. The issue was priorities. Shouldn't the Lord's day be different?

May I ask you something? What are your priorities? If your boss demanded you do something unethical and said, "Do this or lose your job," what would you do? Would you rationalize, "Well, God gave me this job. Certainly, He wouldn't want me to lose it. I need it to provide for my family. He'll understand if I fudge a little this once." Is that what you'd do, or this? Would you determine, "I will do what God wants. Period. Come what may, God is first and everything else comes next."

I don't know the pressure points in your life. Maybe it's not your job, maybe it's the way you use your time. Does God come first? Maybe it's the way you spend your money. I challenge you today to get serious about putting God first.

II. Situation #2: The Plot (6-9)

The plot involved Daniel's peers and the king. Notice the part both played.

A. His peers framed him (6-8). Verses 6-8 explain how they did it, "Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto Him, King Darius, live forever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counselors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, except of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which alters not."

It was a sinister plot in which Daniel's peers used two wicked devices to frame him.

1. *They used flattery.* They set the king up big time. Listen again to their sugar-coated words, "King Darius, live forever (what they meant was, "We'd like to be king, but since that's not possible, we're going to use you to bump off Daniel and move ourselves up the ladder"). They flattered the king with this clever plan to "honor" him. Their proposal sounded like a pledge of loyalty to him, but in actuality, it was a pledge of hatred against Daniel.

2. *They used deception.* How so? Don't miss the three letter lie in v 7. The cabinet members told the king, "ALL the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, etc., have consulted together." Hold on. Were they *all* there? One wasn't. One certainly would not have gone along with the pagan proposal. Who? Daniel.

By the way, please don't think, "If I do good, live my Christian life, and mind my own business, the world will applaud, or at least leave me alone, right?" Wrong. Righteousness blows the curve on the test. It also arouses jealousy and hatred.

Daniel was a righteous man, but his peers framed him. By a clever use of flattery and exaggerated deception, they hoodwinked Darius. What did the king do?

B. The king forgot him (9). V 9 says matter-of-factly, "Wherefore, King Darius signed the writing and the decree." We would shout, "Darius, wait a minute! Don't sign that! Can't you see the red flags? You have one man in your service, your most loyal assistant, the one you've been thinking about promoting to senior vice-president status (3), who had no part in this godless plan. And if you would stop and think about it for a moment, you'd remember why. Daniel is a man who fears God above all else."

The problem is, when people live for themselves, they forget others. So the decree was given. For 30 days, anyone who dared to ask a favor from God or man would be thrown to the lions. No questions asked. It was the law.

On May 2, the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, the highest award for an American citizen, was given to Billy Graham. There in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington D.C., our nation's powerful leaders honored this man of God. His reception speech was gracious, yet direct. He said that America is a great country, yet America is in trouble. He said what we need to do is repent and turn to God through Jesus Christ.

God gave Billy Graham a platform, and he used it to honor God. What are you doing with the platform God has given you? Your job, your position as little league coach, whatever. God gives some people a platform, and they fall in love with the platform instead of God. Like Daniel's peers. But Daniel used his platform to honor God.

III. Situation #3: The Prayer (10-14)

Here's the best part of the story. Watch the response of the three parties: Daniel, his peers, and the king. What did they do next?

A. Daniel prayed like he always prayed (10-11). What would you have done? If we're honest, most of us are a little embarrassed to bow our heads and pray in a public restaurant, and the worst that could happen is somebody might snicker a little. But with his neck on the line, Daniel prayed. I want you to notice six things about Daniel's prayer.

1. *It was a bold prayer.* V 10 states, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did previously."

My friend, when Daniel prayed that day, it wasn't out of ignorance. It wasn't a slip up. It wasn't a case of poor judgment. He knew about the decree. It didn't matter. He did what he always did. He went to his house and prayed like he always prayed. With his windows open, mind you! It was a bold prayer!

2. *It was a biblical prayer.* Notice the direction of his prayers--"toward Jerusalem." Why towards Jerusalem? What was Jerusalem? It was the city of God, but it lay in ruins. So how did that make Daniel's prayer a biblical prayer?

I want to take you on a trip to find the answer. First, look at Jeremiah 29:1--it says that the prophet Jeremiah sent a written message from Jerusalem to the captives in Babylon. Second, look at Daniel 9:2--there we learn that Daniel actually received and held that book of Jeremiah. Third, look at Jeremiah 29:12 to find out what God told the captives through Jeremiah, "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and ye shall find me, when ye search for me with all your heart. And I will be found by you, saith the LORD; and I will turn away your captivity...and I will bring you again into the place from which I caused you to be carried away captive."

Daniel prayed a biblical prayer! When he looked out that window towards Jerusalem, and called out to God, it was because he was claiming God's promise!

3. *It was a humble prayer.* V 10 says "he kneeled upon his knees." What does the posture of kneeling indicate? Submission. Dependence. Humility.

When was the last time you knelt before God? I mean, literally, when was the last time you got down on your knees with your face to the ground, and called out in brokenness to God? Has it been too long? Later I'm going to give you an opportunity.

4. *It was a disciplined prayer.* I remind you that Daniel was a busy executive, but in spite of all his pressures and demands, he carved out of his schedule time for prayer. Three times a day, every day (to be accurate), he retired to his house to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for his personal needs.

Don't miss this. Godliness doesn't just happen. It takes discipline. Daniel had to say "no" to other things, to other good things, in order to be a man of prayer. Perhaps he

skipped lunch or ESPN, I don't know, but I do know that he disciplined himself to pray three times each day. Do you make prayer a priority in your life?

5. *It was a grateful prayer.* V 10 says he "gave thanks before his God." Gave thanks? For what? Wasn't his life on the line, and his homeland in shambles? Yes. Yet still he gave thanks because he viewed life from God's perspective. He knew God would restore Jerusalem, and what if he did have to face the lion's den? To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord! To live is Christ, to die is gain!

6. *It was a specific prayer.* We see this in v 11, "Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and *making supplication* before his God." What was he saying to God in his prayer? The NIV states he was "asking God for help."

Beloved, that's what prayer is. Prayer isn't just words. It's not saying liturgical formulas. Do you realize the privilege we have? God says, "Ask me for help!" "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to *help* us in our time of need (Heb 4:16)." Do you have needs in your life? Ask God for help!

Why don't we pray more often, more zealously, more specifically? Maybe it's because we've forgotten how much we need help! Daniel knew he needed prayer so much that he chose prayer and a lion's den over no prayer and freedom. So then...

B. His peers pounced on him as planned (12-15). Verses 12-15 tell us what happened. After framing Daniel, they ratted on him, and carried out their caustic plan.

C. A pagan king prayed (16). Darius tried to find a loophole, but there was none. Ironically, the best he could do for Daniel was offer a back-handed prayer (16, NIV), "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" Did He? We'll see next time.

Lessons: What can we learn from Daniel? Daniel calls us to do two things.

1. *We must take God seriously.* Do you want to hear something that should blow your mind? Psalm 9:10 states, "Those who know your name will trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You." God doesn't forsake those who what? Who seek Him. Hebrews 11:6 says He is a rewarder of those who what? Who seek Him.

Are we really taking God seriously as a church? Listen to E. M. Bounds (Prayer and Revival): "It is much easier to send for a reputed evangelist to stir up a revival than to pray fervently until revival happens. It is much easier to engineer a great religious movement by human forces than it is to break our hearts and humble ourselves in the dust before God that He may inaugurate a real religious movement. It is much easier to preach about saving the heathen than it is to place ourselves in their stead, as their substitutes before God, and plead with Him until He touches, overpowers, and influences all the springs of human and divine action..." Let's not playing games. Let's determine to take God seriously. If we truly are, we must do something else Daniel did.

2. *We must take prayer seriously.* My friend, when was the last time you really prayed? How long has it been since you cried out to God, in brokenness and humility, and asked God to help you? When you said, "O God, help me with this sinful habit! Help me with my wayward child! Help me reach my unsaved spouse! Help me regain my first love for You?" How long? Too long?

Response: One problem we have on Sundays is that we hear the Word of God, get convicted, and then leave. And the Evil one snatches the seed from the soil of our hearts. I don't want that to happen today. I want to give you a chance to respond.

1. Sing: "I Need Thee Every Hour" (#428) Do you need Him? Do you need His help today? If you do, then...

2. Kneel and pray, as Daniel knelt and prayed without shame though people were watching. While the piano is playing, pray and admit to God, "I need Your help." Confess your sin, your pride, your independence. Accept God's forgiveness in Christ.

3. Come and pray with others. Our pastor's prayer partners are going to come to the front, kneel, and pray for God to help us as a church. We need His help. We need His Spirit to break down walls, to soften hearts, to bring conviction of sin. If you would like to come and pray with them, please do. If you would like someone to pray for you, come.

4. Sing: "Take Time to Be Holy"